



1994's MOST BIZARRE SUICIDE

At the 1994 annual awards dinner given by the American Association for Forensic Science, AAFS President Don Harper Mills astounded his audience in San Diego with the legal complications of a bizarre death. Here is the story:

"On 23 March 1994, the medical examiner viewed the body of Ronald Opus and concluded that he died from a shotgun wound of the head. The decedent had jumped from the top of a ten-storey building intending to commit suicide (he left a note indicating his despondency). As he fell past the ninth floor, his life was interrupted by a shotgun blast through a window, which killed him instantly. Neither the shooter nor the decedent was aware that a safety net had been erected at the eighth floor level to protect some window-washers and that Opus would not have been able to complete his suicide anyway because of this."

"Ordinarily," Dr Mills continued, "a person who sets out to commit suicide ultimately succeeds, even though the mechanism might not be what he intended. That Opus was shot on the way to certain death nine storeys below probably would not have changed his mode of death from suicide to homicide. But the fact that his suicidal intent would not have been successful caused the medical examiner to feel that he

had homicide on his hands.

"The room on the ninth floor whence the shotgun blast emanated was occupied by an elderly man and his wife. They were arguing and he was threatening her with the shotgun. He was so upset that, when he pulled the trigger, he completely missed his wife and the pellets went through the window, striking Opus.

"When one intends to kill subject A but kills subject B in the attempt, one is guilty of the murder of subject B. When confronted with this charge, the old man and his wife were both adamant that neither knew that the shotgun was loaded. The old man said it was his long-standing habit to threaten his wife with the unloaded shotgun. He had no intention to murder her—therefore, the killing of Opus appeared to be an accident. That is, the gun had been accidentally loaded.

"The continuing investigation turned up a witness who saw the

old couple's son loading the shotgun approximately six weeks prior to the fatal incident. It transpired that the old lady had cut off her son's financial support and the son, knowing the propensity of his father to use the shotgun threateningly, loaded the gun with the expectation that his father would shoot his mother. The case now becomes one of murder on the part of the son for the death of Ronald Opus."



Sam Wille

THE TWILIGHT ZONE

There was an exquisite twist. "Further investigation revealed that the son [Ronald Opus] had become increasingly despondent over the failure of his attempt to engineer his mother's murder. This led him to jump off the ten-storey building on March 23, only to be killed by a shotgun blast through a ninth storey window.

"The medical examiner closed the case as a suicide."

The source for this story is obscure. Several correspondents forwarded it from various odd Usenet groups.

(Source: *Fortean Times* #79, February-March, 1995)

MYSTERY LIGHTS, FIRES AND MASS HYSTERIA

During the winter of 1904-1905 there was a remarkable outbreak of mysterious occurrences in many parts of Great Britain. There were reports of apparitions, haunted houses, poltergeist phenomena and uncanny fires.

In Wales there was a great religious revival. And over the singing, shouting crowds there were luminous appearances. Glowing clouds hovered and dipped over

the people, rose and floated away to descend over other assemblies. Shining things, or beings, travelled about, appearing as white lights or balls of reddish fire. These were especially evident at the meetings conducted by a Mrs Mary Jones, one of the prominent leaders. It was said that one light persistently followed Mrs. Jones's carriage and could not be shaken off by abruptly turning from one road to another.

London reporters, who had been sent to Wales, at first sent back flippant stories. Then they, too, witnessed the clouds and lights. The representatives of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* told of seeing brilliant lights form over chapels while services were in progress, and of following them as they drifted away from these meetings. There were lengthy speculations on whether the appearances were objective or subjective.

B. G. Evans, in his account in the *London Daily News* (9 February 1905), said he witnessed the lights when he was with Mrs Jones at the meetings in Egryn. "The first light," he wrote, "resembled a brilliant star emitting sparklets. All saw this. The next two were as clearly subjec-

tive, being seen only by Mrs Jones and me, though the five of us walked abreast. Three bars of clear white light crossed the road in front, from left to right, climbing up the stone wall to the right. A blood-red light, about a foot from the ground in the middle of the roadway...was the next manifestation."

Perhaps, from human batteries, religious enthusiasm and ecstasy, under conditions as yet unknown, an outpouring of combined forces can be produced, a projection of psychophysical energy comparable to that found in poltergeist phenomena, but mild and harmless instead of dynamic and destructive. Light has often been associated with spirit and worship. Adepts tell of an interior illumination. Certain saints are said to have been luminous at times. Christ was called the "Light of the World".

"Wales in the grip of supernatural forces," headlined the *Liverpool Echo* on 18th January.

Spreading into Scotland and England, the revival degenerated into mass hysteria. Girl clerks in stores would ignore customers and begin singing and clapping hands. Other bands of girls entered the more sedate churches and started noisy meetings of their own. Men went from shop to shop, 'returning' things they had not stolen; others confessed to sins that, if true, would have meant they were human fiends. There were suicides and mental breakdowns. Bands stood outside football games and theatres trying to keep people from entering; other bands roamed the streets and invaded police stations where they tried to convert the officers.

Groups of women in Leeds, claiming they were directed by visions, stopped carriages and cars and attempted to force the passengers to join them in street meetings. "Holy dancers" appeared in London. In Liverpool, riots broke out when howling revivalists slugged Catholics and stoned their homes. One man, taking a biblical passage literally, chopped his right hand off; another led a procession every night, towing his coffin behind him. "When you see one of these processions," a Liverpool magistrate advised, "run from it as you would from a mad bull."

And it was in the midst of this excitement that there were instances of apparent spontaneous human combustion.

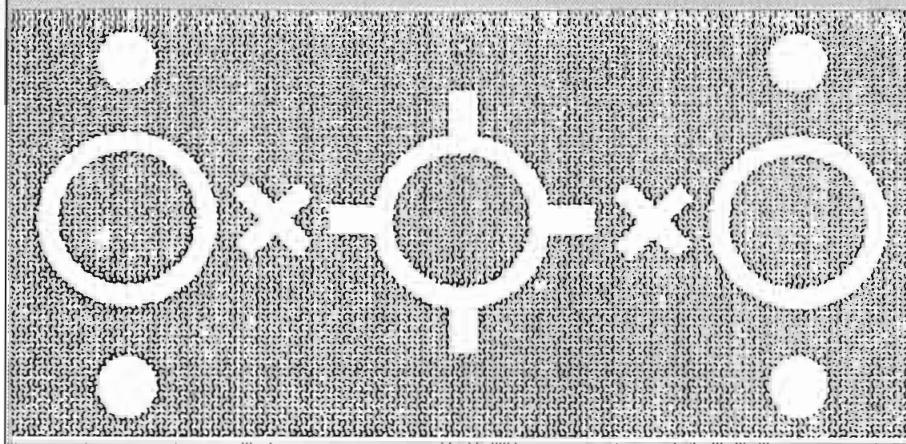
Mrs Thomas Cochrane, of Rosehall, Falkirk, widow of a prominent local man, was found "burned beyond recognition" in her bedroom. The body was in a chair sur-

— AMAZING MAIZE MAZE —

Botswana, Africa — This intriguing glyph sequence was formed sometime in 1994 within a maize crop. It's very notable in being a rare record of a crop formation in Africa, as reported in the newsletter, *UFO Afrinews*.

The diagram is based on a drawing made by the farmer for a Martin Chibanda from Zimbabwe, who met him by chance. Unlike standard formations, the pattern was burned into the crop and the grapeshot appeared to have been "dug into the soil". The farmer was apparently more concerned with the loss of his crop than with the appearance of the pattern!

(Source: *UFO Afrinews* via Lois Horowitz, as reported in *Sussex Circular* #38, February 1995)



rounded by pillows and cushions, but they were not burned. There had been no outcry. No fire in the grate.

Mrs Cochrane died on 16th December 1904. About a week later, another fire victim was Elizabeth Clark, an elderly inhabitant of the Trinity Almshouse in Hull. She was found with her body covered with burns, but still living. She was unable to explain her injuries, and died "without giving a clue to the mystery". Her bedclothing was not scorched. Persons in nearby rooms had heard no outcry. "There was no fire nor light in the room."

Early in February 1905, a woman in London was fatally burned while sitting in a chair asleep in front of a fireplace. The coroner was puzzled. He said a cinder might have shot from the grate igniting the victim's clothing, but she had been facing the fire and the burns were on her back. At about the same time a man, Ashton Clodd, aged 75, died in the Louth Hospital of severe burns. The coroner in Louth was puzzled, too. A witness testified that "if there was a fire in the fireplace, it was very little".

Barbara Bell, aged 77, died on 28 February. Smoke was observed by neighbours coming from the windows of her cottage in Blyth. Her body, found lying on a sofa, was "fearfully charred...as if for a long time it had been in the midst of intense flames".

Did the mass hysteria of that winter have any relationship to these deaths? Could the released emotions of thousands of persons have attracted forces or beings that attack with fire?

Footnotes:

1. Quoted in *Encyclopedia of Psychic Science*, p. 207; other accounts are in *Proceedings*, Society for Psychical Research, vol. 19; *Occult Review*, vol. 1; *Review of Reviews*, July 1905; and *Books of Charles Fort*, p. 655.

2. Harry Price, *Poltergeist Over England*, Country Life Ltd, London, 1945, p. 332.

(Source: Vincent Gaddis, *Mysterious Fires and Lights*, Borderland Sciences Research Foundation, Garberville, CA, USA, 1994, pp. 147-48)

THE GREEN CHILDREN

This story is told by two old English chroniclers, Ralph of Coggeshall and William of Newbridge. The events are supposed to have taken place in the twelfth century, some say in the reign of King

Stephen. This would have been some two generations after the Norman conquest, when people were speaking a mixture of Anglo-Saxon and Norman-French.

One bright sunny day, some good people from the village of St Mary's in Suffolk, found two children wandering and crying near a wolf pit. The children, a girl and a younger boy, were like normal humans in shape, but their skin and hair were green. The children seemed to be dazzled by the sunlight and confused. They spoke in a strange language and did not appear to understand what the villagers said to them.

Not knowing what else to do, the people of St Mary's took the children to the house of Sir Richard de Caine. His was the biggest household in the district and he had room in which to shelter the children. Even Sir Richard, who was a man of the world, could not understand what the children were saying. They were treated kindly, and meat and bread was set before them.

The children appeared to be hungry, but pushed the bread and meat aside and continued to weep. Then, by chance, some green broad beans were brought in from the gardens. Eagerly, the children snatched at them but opened the stalks instead of the pods, and when they found no beans inside they once more fell to weeping. A member of the household showed the children how to open the pods and find the fat beans inside. At last the children ate and became more composed in their manner.

The children stayed with Sir Richard de Caine. At first they ate only green food and the boy became depressed and sickly. Sadly, he died, but the girl learned to eat the same food as the rest of the household and she lost her green colour and took on the appearance of a normal human being.

After a while she came to speak the Anglo-Norman language of her benefactors and at

last she was able to tell her story.

The girl said that she had lived in a land where the light was always dim and dappled, where all the animals and the people were green, as she had been.

She said that her home was called St Martin's Land and that although the people were Christian, she thought they also worshipped St Martin. The sun never rose in St Martin's Land, but a bright country could be seen far away, across a wide river.

One day she and her brother were tending their flocks when they came to the entrance of a large cavern. They heard the sound of sweet bells and could not resist going into the cavern to see what was making the beautiful music. On and on and up and up they wandered, through twisting passages, until suddenly they came out into brilliant sunlight. They had never seen the sun, nor such bright daylight before. Their eyes hurt and their heads ached. They blundered about in confusion and could not find their way back to the entrance into the cavern. After hours and hours, when they were hungry and exhausted, they were found by the villagers.

Many times after this, Sir Richard ordered a search to be made for the entrance to the cavern, but it was never found.

The girl remained in service in Sir Richard's household, and when she was grown up she married a man from Lenna.

(Source: unconfirmed)

